

### THE CHINOOK JARGON.

BY MYRON EELLS.

No one person is competent to write a dictionary of the Chinook jargon, because it is so constantly changing and is used very differently at the same time in different localities. Words that are very common at one place are sometimes obsolete a hundred and fifty miles from that place, and words that have been adopted into the language from the English in one place are unknown to neighboring Indians.

In order to write a complete dictionary of the jargon, one should learn to speak it thoroughly in one place, then go to all the other places where it is spoken differently, and spend enough time at each place to note the differences. This would necessitate a residence in northern California, southern Oregon, the Willamette valley, eastern Oregon, northern Idaho, north-eastern and middle Washington, Puget sound, several localities in British Columbia both east and west of the Cascade mountains, and several places in Alaska.

#### *Origin and History.*

The following account, taken from Hale's "Oregon Trade Language," is probably as good a history of the jargon as there is, to within a few years:

The British and American trading ships first appeared on the north-west coast during the closing years of the last century. The great number of languages spoken by the native tribes proved to be a serious hindrance to their business. Had it chanced that any one of these languages was of easy acquisition and very generally diffused, like the Chippeway among the eastern tribes, the Malay in the Indian Archipelago, and the Italian in the Mediterranean, it would, no doubt, have been adopted as the medium of communication between the whites and the natives. Unfortunately, all these languages—the Nootka, Nisqually, Chinook, Chihailish, and others—were alike harsh in pronunciation, complex in structure, and each spoken over a very limited space. The foreigners, therefore, took

no pains to become acquainted with any of them. But, as the harbour of Nootka was at that time the headquarters or chief emporium of the trade, it was necessarily the case that some words of the dialect there spoken became known to the traders, and that the Indians, on the other hand, were made familiar with a few English words. These, with the assistance of signs, were sufficient for the slight intercourse that was then maintained. Afterwards the traders began to frequent the Columbia River, and naturally attempted to communicate with the natives there by means of the words which they had found intelligible at Nootka. The Chinooks, who are quick in catching sounds, soon acquired these words, both Nootka and English, and we find that they were in use among them as early as the visit of Lewis and Clark, in 1804.

But when, at a later period, the white traders of Astor's expeditions, and from other quarters, made permanent establishments in Oregon, it was soon found that the scanty list of nouns, verbs, and adjectives then in use was not sufficient for the more constant and general intercourse which began to take place. A real language, complete in all its parts, however limited in extent, was required; and it was formed by drawing upon the Chinook for such words as were requisite, in order to add to the skeleton of which they already possessed the sinews and tendons, the connecting ligaments, as it were, of a speech. These consisted of the numerals (the ten digits and the word for hundred), twelve pronouns (*I, thou, he, we, ye, they, this, other, all, both, who, what*), and about twenty adverbs and prepositions (such as—*now, then, formerly, soon, across, ashore, off-shore, inland, above, below, to, with, &c.*). Having appropriated these and a few other words of the same tongue, the Trade Language—or, as it now began to be styled, "the jargon"—assumed a regular shape, and became of great service as a means of general intercourse.

But the new idiom received additions from other sources. The Canadian *voyageurs*, as they are called, who enlisted in the service of the American and British fur companies, were brought more closely in contact with the Indians than any others of the foreigners. They did not merely trade, they travelled, hunted, ate, and, in short, lived with them on terms of familiarity. The consequence was that several words of the French language were added to the slender stock of the jargon. These were only terms such as did not previously belong to it, including the names of various articles of food and clothing in use among the Canadians (bread, flour, overcoat, hat), some implements and articles of furniture (axe, pipe, mill, table, box), several of the parts of the body (head, mouth, tongue, teeth, neck, hand, foot), and, characteristically enough, the verbs to run, sing, and dance. A single conjunction or connective particle, *puis*, corrupted to *pe* and used with the various meanings of *then, besides, and, or*, and the like, was also derived from this source.

Eight or ten terms were made by what grammarians term onomatopœia,—that is, were formed by a rude attempt to imitate sound, and are therefore

the sole and original property of the jargon. Considering its mode of formation, one is rather surprised that the number of these words is not greater. *Liplip* is intended to express the sound of boiling water, and means to boil. *Tingting*, or, more commonly, *tintin* (for the nasal sound is difficult to these Indians) is the ringing of a bell, and thence any instrument of music. *Po* or *poo* is the report of a gun; *tiktik* is for a watch; *tuntum* is the word for heart, and is intended to represent its beating. The word *tum*, pronounced with great force, dwelling on the concluding *m*, is the nearest approach which the natives can make to the noise of a cataract; but they usually join with it the English word *water*, making *tum-wata*, the name which they give to the falls of a river. *Mash* represents the sound of anything falling or thrown down (like the English *mash* and *smash*); *klak* is the sound of a rope suddenly loosed from its fastenings, or "let go."

All the words thus combined in this singularly constructed language, at that stage of its existence, were found to number, according to my computation, about two hundred and fifty. Of these, eighteen were of Nootka origin, forty-one were English, thirty-four French, one hundred and eleven Chinook, ten formed by onomatopœia, and some thirty-eight were of doubtful derivation, though probably for the most part either Chinook or Nootka. But, as might be expected, the language continued to develop. Its grammar, such as it was, remained the same, but its lexicon drew contributions from all the various sources which have been named, and from some others. In 1863, seventeen years after my list was published, the Smithsonian Institution put forth a "Dictionary of the Chinook Jargon," prepared by the late George Gibbs, a thoroughly competent investigator. His collection comprised nearly five hundred words. Those of Chinook origin had almost doubled, being computed at two hundred and twenty-one. The French had more than doubled, and comprised now ninety-four words. The English words were sixty-seven. The great Salish or "Flathead" stock, with whose tribes, next to the Chinook, the Oregon traders had the largest relations, furnished thirty-nine words. The Nootka in its various dialects, now yielded twenty-four. The others, about forty, were due to the imitation of natural sounds, or were of casual or undetermined derivation.

Since the publication of the vocabulary of Gibbs, no material change seems to have been made in the language. Two later dictionaries of the jargon have come into my hands—small pamphlets, both printed in Victoria, British Columbia, the one in 1878 and the other as late as 1887. The former is announced as the "sixth edition," the latter is described as a "new edition"—facts which sufficiently prove the continued and extensive use of this international speech.

Mr. Hale says that since the publication of the dictionary of Gibbs no material change seems to have been made in the jar-

gon because two late dictionaries which he has obtained show no great change. This is a mistake, but a very natural one for him to make, for I have examined seven dictionaries which have been published since that of Gibbs, and only one of them, that of J. B. Good, shows much change; and Mr. Hale while in Canada could not see the changes which are going on, but which are not shown in the dictionaries. The reason they do not show these changes, undoubtedly, is that the great change is in the adoption into the jargon of words from the English, and it is not necessary to put such words into a dictionary in order that English-speaking people may learn their meaning. Changes have been going on in the jargon just as steadily since the publication of Gibbs' dictionary as before that time. The great tendency has been to drop words of French and Indian origin and to introduce others from the English. This is easily accounted for from the fact that during the last thirty or forty years the French Canadians of the Hudson Bay Company have mainly been crowded out of the United States and a large part of British Columbia to the very frontiers, while English-speaking people have taken their places, mingling and working with Indians.

*Usefulness and Future of the Jargon.*

The usefulness of the jargon is proved by the fact that it has lived and worked its way from its birthplace, at the mouth of the Columbia river, south to California, east to the Rocky mountains, and north far into Alaska, and this has been done notwithstanding the paucity of its vocabulary, its lack of grammar, the fact that nice shades of meaning cannot be easily expressed in it, and that it has numerous Indian languages and the English with which to contend, which the people have used from infancy and which they prefer to use whenever they can. In the region bounded by the above limits are scores of Indian languages which would be very difficult for the whites to acquire. The Chinook jargon obviates the necessity of learning them, as a person who has acquired it can easily converse with Indians who speak different languages.

It was this which led me to acquire it. When I came to the Skokomish reservation, in 1874, three entirely different Indian

languages besides the Chinook jargon were spoken here by Indians belonging to as many tribes. My intention was to learn the one native to the place, but I soon found that if I were to do so I would not be able to converse with the Indians belonging to the other two tribes; so I learned the Chinook jargon, and found it very useful.

Horatio Hale said in 1841 that the tide of white population which was setting in this direction would soon overwhelm it, "leaving no trace, but such as may exist on the written page." In 1890 he said that the prediction has been only partially fulfilled, adding, "the language, in fact, seems destined to a long life and wide usefulness, though in a region somewhat remote from its original seat. On the site of Fort Vancouver it is now only heard from stray Indians, who have wandered thither from their reservations. But on the reservations and in the interior it is still in frequent use. . . . In British Columbia and parts of Alaska it is the prevailing medium of intercourse between the whites and the natives. There, too, the Indian tribes are not likely to die out." He also adds that these natives are likely to keep up a friendly commerce with their civilized neighbors for centuries, and that this will be done by means of this jargon; so that there is reason to believe that it will have its office of an international speech to fulfill among the many-languaged tribes of northwestern America for hundreds and perhaps thousands of years to come. This spread, this life of the jargon, so contrary to his ideas fifty years ago, is due solely to its usefulness.

Its future will depend on this same usefulness. As the Indians die or learn to speak English, as they are now doing on Puget sound, it will soon be of no use. I have been surprised to see how little Chinook the school children know who are even sixteen years of age. Yet the reason is plain; it is for intercourse between whites and Indians. But they have learned the English from an early age, and so have had no use for the Chinook. As nearly all the Indian children on Puget sound of school age are now in school, there will be no use for it when their parents are dead.\* But so long as there will be Indians from California to

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\* Oregon Trade Language, pp. 21, 22.



Alaska who cannot easily speak English, so long will it be useful and live; Hale prophesies for hundreds or even thousands of years; I cannot prove the contrary.

*Letters.*

The following letters are those which properly belong to the jargon as it was spoken forty years ago, namely, *a, b, c, d, e, g, h, i, k, l, m, n, o, p, s, t, u, y, z*. Of late years, since so many English words have crept into use, the Indians have learned to use nearly all the other English sounds, as *f, j, v*, and even occasionally *r*, the most difficult of all for the Indian to use, while *q* is *kw* and *x* is *ks*. Père St. Onge says that *kl* is not proper, not being used by the Indians, but rather *tl*. I shall not dispute him in regard to its use where he has lived, but on Puget sound it is one of the very common sounds, not only in the Chinook jargon but in the native languages.

*Number of Words.*

The number of words I have recorded in the Chinook-English part is 1,402; in addition to these there are 1,552 phrases which answer to single English words. I have rejected none that I have found in any dictionary or in use among the Indians. Gibbs in his excellent dictionary did reject a number, because he did not believe they properly belonged to the jargon, but were introduced by some persons for the sake of local convenience. But I have not done so; for as I think I know better than people at a distance what words are used in this region here and now, so I believe that Rev. S. Parker knew better than myself what ones were used about Fort Vancouver in 1835; that Hon. J. G. Swan knew better than I do what were used about Shoalwater bay in 1853; that Rev. S. P. Good knew what were used on Thompson's river ten years ago; that Père St. Onge knew better what were used in middle Washington when he lived there, although many of these words may not be used here or may be entirely obsolete.

The increase in the number of words now used and those formerly recorded may be seen from the fact that Gibbs gives

490 words; Hale, 473; Gill, 560; Durieu, 425 words and phrases; St. Onge, 787; and I have found 1,402, and 2,954 words and phrases. In the English-Chinook part, Hale gives 634; Gibbs, 792; Good, 825, and Gill, 1,378, while Durieu and St. Onge have no such part. I have found 4,001. St. Onge gives 67 phrases which begin with the word *mamook*; I have found 209.

*Words—Changes.*

Transition is and always has been a more marked feature of this jargon than of almost any language. Many words used years ago are not used now; others have taken their places, while many new ones have also been introduced. Of the 1,402 words I have found, only 740 are now used in this region, and of these I have recorded 374 which I have found in no other dictionary, nearly all of which are of English origin. In 1863 Gibbs gave more of French origin than of English—94 of the former and 67 of the latter. When, however, the Hudson Bay Company removed from this region, and with it the French Canadians, these words of French derivation began to be dropped. Thus out of 111 such words which began with the letter *l*, only 33 are now used in this region. Many words of Indian origin have likewise been dropped, English words having taken their places.

The words which are used here now are, however, not all used in other places, and undoubtedly there are many employed in other localities which are in none of the dictionaries and which are not used here. It has even sometimes been said that it is quite difficult for a person who can speak the jargon on Puget sound to understand it as spoken in Oregon or British Columbia, and while I have not found this to be exactly true, yet I have found considerable difference in its use. A year ago I asked Dr. W. C. McKay, of Pendleton, Oregon, to mark those words in Gill's dictionary which were in use in northeastern Oregon. He did so, and I found 131 words which had not been used on Puget sound.

On reservations where Catholic missionaries labor among the Indians many words are used which are different from those employed where Protestant missionaries work, although they may not be very far apart. Among the former not so many of

the words of French derivation have been dropped as among the latter.

*Obsolete Words.*

It is very difficult to learn how many words have become completely obsolete, although many are undoubtedly so, because those which are obsolete in one region are not in another. As just mentioned, of the 1,402 words I have found, 662 are obsolete here, and of the 1,028 I have found in the various dictionaries, only 288 are used here.

A noted instance of how a word may become obsolete is found in the word *mamook*. On Puget sound it is probably the most common word in use. I have found 209 phrases which begin with it, which answer to a single English word, two and a half times as many as any other word begins. Dr. F. Boas says, however, that it "has acquired an obscene meaning, and is no longer in use on the Columbia river."\*

*New Words.*

It is a singular fact that while new words are being constantly introduced into the jargon, that new dictionaries have been made and new editions of old ones published, yet very few of these words have been inserted. Good has done more of this than any other writer, probably because he was a missionary among the Indians, used these words in his intercourse with them, and so found that they had become a part of the language.

I have often noticed these new words as they were being introduced. Twenty years ago we used the word *Sunday* both for week and the Sabbath, but now *week* is used for week, and *Sunday* for the Sabbath.

It may be objected that these are English words and do not properly belong to the Chinook jargon, but they are used both by whites and Indians when they employ the jargon, and so have become a part of it, as it now is, as certainly as *house*, *stone*, or *shuga* were in 1863.

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\*Science, March 4, 1892, p. 129.



*Origin of Words.*

The origin of a large number of words is given below as far as I have been able to learn them. The second column gives the origin of those found by Gibbs:

|                       | <i>Ells.</i> | <i>Gibbs.</i> |
|-----------------------|--------------|---------------|
| English .....         | 570          | 67            |
| Chinook .....         | 198          | 200           |
| French .....          | 147          | 90            |
| Chehalis .....        | 64           | 32            |
| Nootka .....          | 23           | 24            |
| Nisqually .....       | 13           | 7             |
| Onoma .....           | 12           | 6             |
| Clatsop .....         | 10           |               |
| Twana .....           | 6            |               |
| Canadian French ..... | 6            | 4             |
| Wasco .....           | 5            | 4             |
| Nittinat .....        | 5            |               |
| Challam .....         | 4            |               |
| Yakima .....          | 4            | 1             |
| Kalapuya .....        | 3            | 4             |
| Nez Percé .....       | 2            |               |
| Klikitat .....        | 2            | 1             |
| Clyoquot .....        | 2            |               |
| Snohomish .....       | 2            |               |
| Bellabella .....      | 1            |               |
| Makah .....           | 1            |               |
| Tillamook .....       | 1            |               |
| Chippeway .....       | 1            |               |
|                       | <hr/> 1,082  |               |

This leaves the origin of 320 unaccounted for, or rather something over that number, as occasionally a single word in Chinook jargon is referred to two or more different languages for its origin.

*Spelling.*

The spelling of the words is a curiosity. The earliest writer who published a dictionary for popular use (Lionnet, in 1853), instead of following the phonetic method, the only one suitable for Indian languages, tried to follow the English method; in other words, no method at all. Gibbs, Gill, and Hibben have

followed him. The latter two were almost the only dictionaries available to the public for many years in Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia, and now it seems to be almost as useless to attempt to reform the spelling, which is very miserable, as it is to reform the spelling of the English language.

While, as a general thing, Gibbs, Hibben, Hale, Tate, Gill, Lowman and Hanford, and Good spell the words nearly alike, yet they do not always do so, and the different ways in which some words are spelled by these and other writers is a curiosity. It shows what even educated men will do in this line when they have no standard authority. Very seldom is any word, even the simplest one, spelled in the same way by all the writers, and some of them are spelled in many different ways. For instance, the word *klonas* is spelled in eight different ways, *ahnkuttie* and *keekwulee* in nine, *klootchman* and *kliminawhit* each in ten, *kloshe* in eleven, *klatawa*, *seahost*, and *mimoluse* each in twelve, *tahtlum* in thirteen, *kalakala* and *kilapi* each in fourteen, and *kunjih* in sixteen ways. The following four examples are given: *Klootchman* (woman), spelled thus by Gibbs, Tate, and Hibben, is spelled *cloocheman* by Winthrop, *cloochemin* by Durieu, *clootchman* by Good, *cloachman* by Lee and Frost, *clotsheman* by Dunn, *kloochman* by Gill and Lowman and Hanford, *kleutchman* by Swan, *tlatcheman* by Ross, *tluchmen* by St. Onge. Powell would spell it *klute-man*.

#### Words—Parts of Speech.

There are far more nouns in the jargon than there are words in all other parts of speech combined—958 out of 1,402, and 817 out of 1,552 phrases representing words. Verbs come next, 165 words and 519 phrases; next are the adjectives, 214 words and 300 phrases. Pronouns claim only ten words and seven phrases; adverbs, fifty words and fifty-six phrases; prepositions, nine words and three phrases; conjunctions, seven words and two phrases, and interjections, sixteen words and two phrases.

#### Expressive Words.

A few words are very expressive, meaning so much and expressing that meaning so much better than our English words

do, that they have been adopted into the English in the region in which the Chinook jargon is used. Of these may be mentioned *cultus*, good for nothing, meaning also abject, barren, bad, common, careless, defective, dissolute, filthy, foul, futile, immaterial, impertinent, impolite, no matter, rude, shabby, slippery, unmeaning, untoward, useless, worthless, paltry, and worn out; *kloshe*, good, with forty-one other meanings; *kloshe nanitch*, take care, with seventeen other meanings; *tamahnous*, sorcery, a noun, adjective, and verb, and referring to anything supernatural between Satan on the one hand and God on the other; *tuntum*, mind, with fifteen other meanings, and *wawa*, with the following eighty-one meanings: as a verb, to ask, talk, converse, speak, call, tell, answer, inquire, declare, salute, announce, apply, articulate, allege, assert, blab, chatter, communicate, converse, argue, demand, discuss, express, exclaim, gab, gossip, harangue, hint, inquire, interrogate, jabber, lecture, mention, mutter, narrate, proclaim, profess, relate, request, remark, report, say, solicit, supplicate, bark (of dog), neigh, whinny (of horse), mew or purr (of cat), grunt (of hog), caw (of crow), warble (of bird), hoot (of owl), coo (of a dove), baa (of a sheep), cackle, cluck, crow (of chickens), quack (of duck), growl (of bear), squeak (of mouse), bleat (of a calf or sheep), yelp; as a noun, an anecdote, conversation, declamation, exclamation, oration, legend, mandate, narrative, message, precept, question, remark, report, sermon, talk, tale, speech, voice.

#### Phrases.

While some words are very expressive, on the other hand it often takes two or more Chinook jargon words to make one in English. As extreme instances, the word geography needs the following: *ikt*, hook, *yaka mamook kumtuks nesika kopa illahee* (one book that teaches us about land); accident needs *nika tuntum yaka halo chako kahkwa* (I thought it not happen so); a butcher, *man yaka kumtuks mamook mimoluse moosmoos* (a man, he knows (how) to kill cattle); a jury, *tenas huju man kopa court klaska tikegh kumtuks kopa konoway mesachie, pe mamook kloshe kopa tillikums* (a few men at court who wish to know about all badness or crimes and straighten out the people).

While many of the Indian words are becoming obsolete, yet a few are so expressive and useful that they are used in many

phrases which answer to a single English word. Thus *hiyu* (many) begins 30 such phrases and is found in 16 others, 46 in all; *wake* begins 53; *kahkwa* begins 54 and is in 14 others, 68 in all; *wawa* begins 31 and is in 46 others, 77 in all; *chako* begins 63 and is in 18 others, 81 in all; *halo* begins 85 and is in 9 others, 94 in all; *tenas* begins 82 and is in 29 others, 111 in all; and *mamook* begins 209 and is in 29 others, 238 in all; these form 209 of the 519 phrases which represent verbs.

#### *Order of the Words.*

There is no settled authority in regard to the order of the words. They are generally placed in much the same order as they are in the language which the speaker has been accustomed to use. An English-speaking person will place them in much the same order as in English, though there are a number of phrases of which this is not true; for instance, *halo nika kumtuks* (not I understand) is much more common than *nika halo kumtuks*. These phrases must be acquired by practice. An Indian who has learned somewhat the English order will arrange the words in much the same way; but if he is an old Indian, or one who knows but little about English, he will arrange them much as he is accustomed to in his native language, which is very different from the English. As the tendency, however, is not for the whites to learn the native languages, but for the Indians to learn English, so the tendency is toward the English order of the words.

#### *Bibliography—Dictionaries and Vocabularies.*

The following are the dictionaries and vocabularies which I have used:

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For more extended notice of these works and all literature referring to the language and jargon, see Chinookan Bibliography by J. C. Pilling.

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